

Chapter 3: Fire Safety

B. Fire Extinguishers: Fact Sheet

Fire extinguishers are classified according to the source of the fire they treat. There are three major classifications.

Type A is for solid combustibles, e.g. wood or paper.

Type B is for flammable liquids, e.g. grease.

Type C is for electrical fires.

Fire extinguishers may work on more than one type of fire. Some are suitable for both flammable liquids and electrical fires.

Extinguishers filled with water are suitable only for type A fires. The extinguishers are quite heavy.

Carbon Dioxide extinguishers can be used on both B and C type fires. They too are heavy. A 15 pound extinguisher refers only to the weight of the discharge, not the entire extinguisher. The discharge is quite cold and can cause frost bite and damage to electronic equipment. In order to be effective, one must stand quite close to the fire, between three and eight feet away. These extinguishers will discharge carbon dioxide for a duration of between 15 and 30 seconds. These extinguishers are environmentally safe.

Dry Chemical extinguishers will work on different types of fires depending on what kind of chemical is used. Generally speaking they are quite messy, and it can be difficult to clean up the discharge. They can also damage electronic equipment. With dry chemical extinguishers, one has to be between five and twelve feet away when battling the fire. They are one of the more inexpensive types of extinguisher. An ammonium phosphate extinguisher will work on all types of fire. Sodium bicarbonate will work on B and C types of fire.

Another option is the halon extinguisher; however, there are many drawbacks to them. Although halon works on all types of fires, it is quite expensive and is only effective in an airtight room. Halon depletes the ozone layer and will not be available in the future.